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Budd, Our Mark Twain: The Making of a Personality

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LOUIS J. BUDD. *OUR MARK TWAIN: THE MAKING OF HIS PUBLIC PERSONALITY*. PHILADELPHIA: THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS, 1983. 266 pp. \$27.50.

Twain wrote that "our heroes are the men who do things which we recognize, with regret and sometime with secret shame, that we cannot do." By the time Twain died in 1910 he had already become a hero to millions of Americans. Hundreds of editorial eulogies followed, and "among the many points of emphasis, vicarious bonding with the man behind his books stood out." The intimacy between author and audience that Twain had developed was without precedent.

Louis Budd's study examines how Twain created this intimacy. Part of it was created through the style of his writing which, Kurt Vonnegut observed, "managed to imply that the reader 'was enough like him to be his brother.'" Additionally, his public performances, reported widely in the American press, reverberated with an irreverence that struck at the social foundations of his age. As Budd comments, "His posturing increasingly became a shared put-on of a decreasing pool of outsiders." Twain's humor, Budd continues, "operated as a liberating force" for many Americans. Twain symbolized American nationalism, independent and brassy.

Twain gave much to his public, but he received much in return. His public audience was much vaster than that segment of the public who actually bought and read his books. Twain was certainly aware of this phenomenon and cultivated that larger audience through his public speaking tours, his dress, his newspaper and magazine writing, and his often outrageous off-the-cuff comments to the press.

Liberally illustrated with newspaper cartoons and photographs, Budd's study will be indispensable for those who wish to understand that complex relationship between Twain the writer and Twain the public personality. *Our Mark Twain* is the product of a scrupulously conscientious, patient scholar, yet written with an unpedantic grace and ease that would have pleased the master himself.

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